DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 242 195 FL 014 265

AUTHOR Aghbar, Ali-Asghar
TITLE Guided Impressionistic Scoring of ESL Compositions.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (17th, Toronto, Ontario, March 16-19, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT WATESOL Working Papers; n1 p36-52 Fall-Win 1983-84

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); *Evaluation Criteria; Grammar; *Holistic Evaluation; Language Tests; Measurement Techniques; *Scoring; *Second Language Instruction; Spelling; Vocabulary; *Writing (Composition); Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS George Mason University VA

ABSTRACT

An adaptation of an impressionistic scoring method developed for use on student placement in an English as a second language (ESL) program is described and a correlational study of its reliability is presented. The method was chosen because of its efficiency and apparent reliability. The original emphasis of organization, length, and content of composition was modified to emphasize grammar, vocabulary, and spelling for placement purposes. Procedures used in the application of the technique are: (1) prepare composition cover sheets with numbers and a place for the student's name; (2) assign a composition topic that will take little student deliberation; (3) provide black pens for writing (for better photocopies); (4) make two copies of each composition; (5) give scorers a practice session; (6) randomly assign numbered (but not otherwise identified) compositions to scorers, who have scoring guidelines; (7) enter scores on cover sheets; (8) have compositions with a difference of more than 12 points between scorers' evaluations rescored by a third scorer; and (9) average scores for a final mark. The scoring time averages four minutes, and has proven to be reliable and valid. Guidelines for scoring and the original technique are appended. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Ali-Asghar Aghbar
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED242195

FL014265

GUIDED IMPRESSIONISTIC SCORING OF ESL COMPOSITIONS*

Ali-Asghar Aghbar
George Mason University

Introduction

It is generally agreed that the composition is a highly valid test of English as a second language. However, it is often excluded from placement and proficiency test batteries because the scoring process is time-consuming and unreliable. If we could find ways of overcoming these drawbacks, then we would have a powerful device for assessing second-language proficiency and achievement.

In the fall of 1981, the impressionistic method of scoring compositions (where the scorers assign a score of 1 to 10 or 1 to 20 upon a quick reading of each composition) was used at the English Language Institute (ELI) of George Mason University in scoring the compositions from the placement test battery. This method was time-efficient; however, it yielded low inter-scorer reliability. Therefore, we had to look elsewhere for a more reliable method of scoring.

In the spring of 1982, we tried a method of scoring proposed by Brodkey and Young (1981) in hopes of achieving a better inter-scorer reliability. In this method, the scorers are asked to select the first 250 words of each composition, assign each error a weight score of 1,2,or 3 (depending on the gravity of the error), and then calculate the Composition Correctness Score by

* This paper was presented at the 1983 TESOL Convention in Toronto and the 1983 WATESOL Mini-Conference at the University of Maryland. The composition scoring method which it proposes is presently in use at the English Language Institute, George Mason University.

Ali Asghav Aghbar holds the Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from Georgetown University. He is the Assistant Director of the English Language Institute, George Mason University, where he also teaches ESL and coordinates testing and research.

dividing 250 (i.e., the number of words) by the sum of the error scores. We found this method to be laborious and time-consuming. Moreover, we did not find it to be superior to impressionistic scoring that was both reliable and efficient.

It was in search of such a method that I came across Virginia Pritchard's method of impressionistic scoring based on a guide (see Powell 1980:15). Pritchard's guide (see Appendix B) looked promising because it seemed to make for a time-efficient and reliable method of scoring.

In her guide, Pritchard places more emphasis on organization, length, and content and less emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. Because the latter categories were more important for our placement purposes, I modified Pritchard's guide and shifted the emphasis to grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. We have used this modified guide (see Appendix A) in scoring the composition component of our placement test battery and have found it to be highly reliable and efficient.

Procedure

I have found the following procedure to be effective in using the guided impressionistic scoring of compositions.

1. Prepare composition cover sheets (see Appendix C). Assign a different test number to each composition cover sheet and staple it to four pages of blank paper. Put the test number on all of the blank sheets. The students write their names only on the cover sheets.
2. Assign a composition topic that the students can write about without much deliberation.

3. Have the students use the black pens which you give them. This will help produce better photocopies.
4. Make two photocopies of each composition. Do not copy the cover sheets. Thus, the scorers do not know the writers and, therefore, are not biased by their identities.
5. Before you ask them to correct the compositions, hold a practice session for the scorers using materials similar to those in the exercise included here in Appendix E.
6. Distribute the copies at random among the scorers and have them score each composition using the guidelines in Appendix A. Make sure no one gets two copies of the same composition.
7. Enter the scores on the cover sheets. (Putting the cover sheets in consecutive order according to the students' test numbers is very helpful.)
8. In cases where there is more than a twelve-point difference between the two scores assigned to the same composition, have the composition scored by a third scorer. (To avoid putting additional burden on the teachers, the testing coordinator can be the third scorer.)
9. The final score for each composition is the average of two scores. If a composition has been scored by three scorers, the final score is the average of the two closest scores.

Results of a Correlational Study

The guided impressionistic scoring of compositions has been used at the ELI of George Mason University a number of times since last summer. On each occasion, approximately ten teachers helped with the scoring. I did a correlational study of the two sets of scores assigned to each set of compositions to see how similarly the students were being ranked by the two sets of scores. Table 1 exhibits the results of this correlational study.

TABLE 1

Correlational Study of Two Sets of Scores Assigned to Each Set of Compositions

	June 1982	Aug.1982	Sept.1982	Jan. 1983
Pearson Correlation	.6530	.7918	.8241	.8806
Number of Students	57	37	114	95
Coefficient of significance	.001	.001	.001	.001

As can be seen from Table 1, the correlation coefficient has increased every time we have tried the scoring method. I can think of two reasons for this. First, the teachers have become more experienced in using the scoring method and, therefore, have been producing more reliable scores. Second, I was able to identify a couple of teachers who assigned significantly higher scores, and excluded them from the subsequent scorings.

I should add, however, that even when the correlation between the two sets of scores was lower, it was still possible to place the students in the appropriate skill levels for three reasons. First, I had two scores for each student and the average of the two scores was closer to the student's skill level than each score separately. Second, because the students were placed in appropriate levels based on a range of scores (e.g., 65 to 69 for Low Advanced), a difference of just a few points probably did not make much of a

difference. Third, the students were placed in the appropriate levels based on their scores on at least three tests in the placement testing battery; therefore, even if they were not placed in the appropriate levels based on their composition scores, the scores on the other tests would help ensure proper placement (see Appendix D).

The placement testing battery at the ELI of George Mason University includes the University of Michigan's English Placement Test (EPT), a composition, and a fifty-item cloze passage. The composition shows relatively high correlations with the EPT and the cloze. This is demonstrated in Table 2.

As can be seen from the correlation coefficents in Table 2, the three tests have a significant amount of shared variance, which means they probably have many common traits. However, although there is significant correlation between the composition and the other tests, the correlation is not extremely high. This means that the composition contains certain traits not shared by the other tests and that it is, therefore, needed to provide a more thorough picture of the students' skills in English.

TABLE 2

Correlational Study of EPT, Composition and Cloze

	Composition w/ EPT	Composition w/ Cloze	EPT w/ Cloze
Summer 1982	r = .7868 n = 50 p = .001	r = .7773 n = 42 p = .001	r = .7645 n = 42 p = .001

	r = .7430	r = .7126	r = .9086
Fall 1982	n = 106	n = 80	n = 83
	p = .001	p = .001	p = .001
	r = .8216	r = .7666	r = .9064
Spring 1983	n = 97	n = 97	n = 95
	p = .001	p = .001	p = .001

Concluding Remarks

The guided impressionistic scoring of compositions is advantageous in three important aspects of testing, namely, validity, reliability, and efficiency.

The composition has for a long time been accepted as a valid test since it provides an integrative picture of the students' "acquired" knowledge of the language. Because the focus is on communication and there is little time for the students to "monitor" their performance, the picture provided is probably very close to the students' performance in writing in real communicative situations.

Despite the high validity that the composition enjoys, it is often excluded from placement test batteries because of problems with interscorer reliability and efficiency. However, I have found the guided impressionistic scoring of compositions described herein successful in solving both these problems. Not only is the scoring method capable of providing highly reliable results, as shown in Table 1 above, but it is also very time-efficient in that each composition takes an average of only four minutes to score.

APPENDIX A

Guide to scoring compositions

Adapted from Virginia Pritchard (TESOL Newsletter, 14, 3:15) by Ali A. Aghbar

Each composition is given two subscores:

(I) a maximum of 15 points for grammar, vocabulary, and spelling;

(II) a maximum of 10 points for rhetorical structure.

The total of these two scores is multiplied by 4 to determine the final score.

Here are the interpretations for some of the part-scores:

Part I. Grammar, vocabulary, spelling

Subscore	Grammar	Vocabulary	Spelling
15	Like native	Like native	No errors
12	Moderately complex and some minor errors	Relatively advanced Used correctly	Only a few errors
9	Simple structure some errors but not many	Basic but used correctly	Some errors but not many
6	Only phrases and fragments are correct	Basic and often used incorrectly	Many errors
3	Shows no sense of English structures	Very basic and used incorrectly	Rampant errors

Part II. Rhetorical structure

Subscore	Development	Essay and paragraph structure	Coherence/Unity

10	Excellent Shows deep insight	Excellent	Excellent
8	Adequate Interesting thoughts	Some minor problems	Good
6	Weak Routine thoughts	Weak	Weak
4	Poor	Poor	Poor
2	A jumble	Shows no structure at all	None

Notes

1. The above scores do not exhaust all the possibilities. You may even assign subscores, such as 7.25.
2. Read a few of the compositions to develop a feel for the kinds of skill levels you are dealing with before you start assigning scores.
3. When assigning scores, match your impressions with the interpretations given above. First, match your impressions with the appropriate interpretation for grammar in Part I. Then increase or decrease the subscore depending on whether the writer fares better or worse in the other columns.

   In Part II, begin with Development and follow a similar procedure.

APPENDIX B

Pritchard's guide to scoring compositions
Reported by Powell (TESOL Newsletter 14,3:15)

Assign one mark from each of the two sections below. Add the two and multiply this "raw score" by 4.

I. ORGANIZATION, LENGTH. CONTENT

15 An interesting and substantial thesis, within a clear structure (introduction, good development, conclusion) and at an appropriate length.

13 Adequate development of relatively interesting and complex ideas. Clear, coherent.

11 Weak development of routine thought, but does stick to the topic.

9 Little organization beyond sentence level.

7 No apparent organization. Doesn't stick to the topic.

5 A jumble. Practically unintelligible.

3 Uninterpretable.

II GRAMMAR, VOCABULARY, SPELLING

10 Excellent, near native.

8 Moderately complex grammar and diction, with occasional errors.

6 Grammar occasionally obscures meaning. Vocabulary limited to common words. Frequent misspellings.

4 Only phrases and fragments are correct. Uses only very basic vocabulary. Rampant misspellings.

2 Shows no sense of the mechanics of English.

APPENDIX C

COMPOSITION COVER SHEET

1. Today's date: _____

2. Your test number is: 37

3. Your name: (Please, print your name very clearly.)

_____, _____

(LAST NAME) (FIRST AND MIDDLE NAMES)

Memorize your test number and write it on all your test sheets instead of your name. Do not write your name on your test sheets.

4. You have one hour (60 minutes) to write a composition.

5. Write on every other line.

6 Write on one side of the sheet; do not write on the back sides.

7. Try to write about two pages. Divide your writing into two or three paragraphs.

8. Do not rewrite. If you make a mistake, simply cross it out and write again.

9. Write clearly. Use the black pens which you have been given.

10. The topic for this composition has been put on the blackboard.

11 If you do not understand the topic or if you have any other questions, ask the examiner to help you.

_____ (Beginning time)

_____ (Ending time)

	Part I	Part II	Subtotal	Total
Score 1	_____ 15	_____ 10	x4=	_____ 100
Score 2	_____ 15	_____ 10	x4=	_____ 100

Score 3	____ 15	____ 10	x4=	____ 100
Average	xxx	xxxx	xxxxxxxxx	____ 100

APPENDIX D

PLACEMENT CRITERIA, SPRING 1983

Level	EPT	Composition	Cloze	Read-Write
Pre-int	0 - 38	20 - 42	0 - 34	0 - 29
Low-int	39 - 53	43 - 51	35 - 58	30 - 43
Int.	54 - 67	52 - 60	59 - 70	44 - 50
Pre-Adv.	68 - 77	61 - 64	71 - 84	51 - 64
Low-Adv.	78 - 83	65 - 69	85 - 88	65 - 74
Adv. A&B	84 - 100	70 -100	89 - 100	75 - 100

Procedure

1. Place the students on the basis of EPT and composition scores.

2. Where there are level discrepancies between the EPT scores and compositon scores, use the cloze and read-write scores to determine placement.

3. Should it become necessary to make changes in placement criteria or the procedure, the Testing Coordinator should be consulted.

4. In the past, the students who had been placed in levels higher than their

proficiency levels did not usually make good progress. We should keep this in mind in placing the students.

Note: The above criteria were devised on the basis of the range in the skill levels of the students and the resources of the ELI in the Spring of 1983. A change in these variables might effect the placement criteria in the future.

APPENDIX E
PRACTICE MATERIALS FOR USING
THE GUIDED IMPRESSIONISTIC SCORING OF ESL COMPOSITIONS

1. The compositions included in this appendix were written by George Mason University ELI students in January, 1983. They had been asked to compare and contrast their countries (or certain aspects thereof) with the U.S.

2. Take three minutes to review as many of these compositions as you can. This should give you a general feel for the skill levels demonstrated in these compositions.

3. Take a few minutes to familiarize yourself with Appendix A. Try to memorize the interpretations for the score 9 in Part I and the score 6 in Part II.

4. Spend about three minutes reading the first composition. As you read, try to hypothesize what the subscores might be and keep modifying your hypothesis in the face of counter evidence. Once you have finished reading the composition, look at the guide in Appendix A to match your impressions with appropriate subscores. You may use decimals (e.g., 7.25) if you wish.

5. The suggested subscores for the compositions in this appendix have been given at the bottom of this page. (These scores are the averages of the

scores assigned by the teachers at the ELI of George Mason University.) Compare your subscores for the first composition with the suggested subscores.

6. Take a few minutes to discuss disagreements.

7. Repeat the steps in 4, 5, and 6 above for each of the remaining compositions.

SUGGESTED SCORES FOR THE COMPOSITIONS IN THIS APPENDIX

Student #	Part I	Part II	Subtotal	Total	Recommended Level
#117	10.5	8	18.5	74	Advanced
#82	3.5	3	6.5	26	Pre-Int
#103	10	7	17	68	Low Adv.
#3	6	5	11	44	Low Int.
#81	8	7.5	15.5	62	Pre-Adv.
#88	8	6.5	14.5	59	Int

#117

There are two different things between life in my own country and that in the United States.

In the first place, most Koreans don't have their own cars. Since Korea is a developing country, most Koreans can't afford to buy their car. However, there are a lot of buses and taxies by transfortation in Korea.

Secondly, it is a way to enter the college. It is very difficult for students graduated from high school to enter the college in Korea. Korean students have to study very hard to pass the exmaination which is prepared by the colleges they want to enter. In fact, when I was in high school, I didn't have time to play with my friends because I had to study all the time.

However, American students have chances to go to college and they can enter the college even easier than Korean students.

In short, even if the life in the United States is even easier and more comfortable than that in Korea, I love Korea, my father land, with many, many beautiful mountains and trees much more than the United States.

#82

My country is Korea and how long here 6 month. now arrived about something. But I don't speak English and school and friend sometimes. But now I am happy because I want school. Study English. and Friend. and drive. freedom!

my country friend looking for me.

my Best friend said you looking for me.

But Americans very good country. I think I want study I want job. I want play. I want anytime.

But my hourse cousin said you play the flute very good. thank you. I am very happy. and just I want American many people. and young people speaking English.

#103

In writing a composition about the life in my country verses the life in the United States, I have to mention first that is a difficult comparison, since the two countries have almost different historical, political, and social background. Since the creation of mankind there is a one goal and only one, which is who to achieve better life? Using the best knowledge you have, in incourging the concievable ideas, and utilizing the most efficient way to achieve it. Back 4000 years ago when the first state, the first government and the greatest civilization ever built had been established along the banks of the Nile there were men love their country, I am seeing the image of the past and the greatness of the present. the mankind's growth was the greatest part of it (I mean his attitude, and his struggle against the evil acts

whenever it occurs).

When I am speaking about America I can't miss the recognition of the technology revolution which the American peoples takes a credit for it. And once more thanks to the system who gives everyone the chance to manipulate his brain power and his attribution to achieve the most efficient life for the mankind.

#3

I was born in Korea. There is East Asia. Our country located between China and Japan. We used to keep Oriental coustom since many years ago.

But American is diffrence. Here is new land. I known that this country is living every country person. So this place have many diffrence coustom.

I can write about American I have studied since last June. I felf to kind, to gentle and to learn about American student. Among me remembering to write about my room mate and some family.

First I felt this country by my roommate. This is Joby. I liked him. He had been lived in Middle Asia for seven years. because his father worked by minetary officer. So he understand about me. I learned to speak and to write by him. And second I felt by some family this is Wilson. He is fifty years old and have two son and one daughter. When Thinkings Given Day I invited his home and he had my country dicsionary.

#81

Freedom! Vhe I arrived in United States. I was very happy. Everything looked like good and everybody just had freedom. Here was not obstacle to young people. They kissed in the street and hugged each other front of other people. In addition every-night they took the party.

However, in korean young people everything prohibited. The girls can't meet the boys. They just have the girl friend. they can't go to the theather and restaraunt. Furthermore if they want to go outside, they must wear the uniform which the color is black. So everyday I though I need freedom.

Now I have been here about one year. If someone asks me what is the better young life, I will answer that the korean is better. Because I thinkg that in United States young people they have too much freedom. They don't have the order. When they are young, they need some kind of obey to elders. Therefore they grow up and then they don't take care everything even themselves. But the korean young people they know what is the order or how to respect the elder. Finally, I want to tell you that when someone is young, he need kind of prohibition.

#88

Hello, I'm from Turkey. Before I came to the United States, I taught that this country is very different from my country. But, later, I learned that it is not very different.

First, I want to write about education style. Every children who are at 7 years old, has to attend elementary school for five years. This is because of the law. After elementary school -- depends on you -- there is is secondary school for three years. And then, if you want to continue your education, you have to go to high school for three years. Universitys are as same as those in U.S.

There are three different kinds of people upon their incomes. Poors, middles, and healtys.

The prices are very high, especially food prices. If you want to buy a car, you have to pay your, at least, 75 salary. If you have to buy an apartment it is more than 140.

Young people are very polite and kind to olders. This is because of our customs. Youngers give their seats to olders in buses, etc.

In summer times, many people travel to seatowns, near beaches to spet their holidays. They try to have happy and funny days.

One of the most important things between people is friendship. Friends always take care of themselves.

Thats all I could write now.

References

Brodkey, Dean and Rodney Young. 1981. Composition correctness scores. TESOL Quarterly 15, 2: 159-167.

Powell, Bill. 1980. ESL and composition: a report. TESOL Newsletter 14,3:15-17.